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Tawney Rachel, or, The fortune-teller

West Smithfield [London]

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TAWNEY RACHEL;

OR,

THE FORTUNE-TELLER:

with some account of

DREAMS, OMENS, & CONJURERS.

DEC 31 1925

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TAWNEY RACHEL,

&c. &c.

TAWNEY RACHEL was the wife of Poaching Giles. There seemed to be a conspiracy in Giles's whole family to maintain themselves by tricks and pilfering. Regular labour and honest industry did not suit their idle habits. They had a sort of genius at finding out every unlawful means to support a vagabond life. Rachel travelled the country with a basket on her arm. She pretended to get her bread by selling laces, cabbage nets, ballads, and history books, and used to buy old rags and rabbit skins. Many honest people trade in these things, and I am sure I do not mean to say a word against honest people, let them trade in what they will. But Rachel only made this traffic a pretence for getting admission into farmer's kitchens, in order to tell fortunes.

She was continually practising on the credulity of silly girls, and took advantage of their ignorance to cheat and deceive them. Many an innocent servant has she caused to be suspected of a robbery, while she herself, perhaps, was in league with the thief. Many a harmless maid has she brought to ruin by first contriving plots and events herself, and then pretending to foretel them. She had not

to be sure, the power of really foretelling things, because she had no power of seeing into futurity; but she had the art sometimes to bring them about according as she had foretold them. So she got that credit for her wisdom which really belonged to her wickedness.

Rachel was also a famous interpreter of dreams; and could distinguish exactly between the fate of any two persons who happened to have a mole on the right or the left cheek. She had a cunning way of getting herself off when any of her prophecies failed. When she explained a dream according to the natural appearance of things, and it did not come to pass, then she would get out of that scrape by saying, that "this sort of dreams went by contraries." Now of two very opposite things the chance is that one of them may turn out to be true; so in either case she kept up the cheat.

Rachel, in one of her rambles, stopped at the house of Farmer Jenkins. She contrived to call when she knew the master of the house was from home, which indeed was her usual way. She knocked at the door; the maids being out a haymaking. Mrs. Jenkins went to open it herself.—Rachel asked her if she would please to let her light her pipe? This was a common pretence, when she could find no other way of getting into a house. While she was filling her pipe, she looked at Mrs. Jenkins and said, she could tell her some good fortune. The farmer's wife, who was a very inoffensive, but a weak and superstitious woman, was curious to know what she meant. Rachel then looked about very carefully, and shutting the door with a mysterious air, asked her if she was sure nobody would hear them. This appearance of mystery

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was at once delightful and terrifying to Mrs. Jenkins, who, with trembling agitation, bid the cunning woman speak out. "Then," said Rachel in a solemn whisper, "there is to my certain knowledge a pot of money hid under one of the stones in your cellar."—"Indeed," said Mrs. Jenkins, "it is impossible, for now I think of it, I dreamt last night I was in prison for debt."—"Did you indeed," said Rachel, "that is quite surprising. Did you dream before twelve o'clock or after?"—"O it was this morning, just before I awoke."—"Then I am sure it is true, for morning dreams always go by contraries," cried Rachel. "How lucky it was you dreamt it so late!" Mrs. Jenkins could hardly contain her joy, and asked how the money was to be come at. "There is but one way," said Rachel, "I must go into the cellar. I know by my art under which stone it lies, but I must not tell."—Then they both went down into the cellar, but Rachel refused to point at the stone unless Mrs. Jenkins would put five pieces of gold into a bason and do as she directed The simple woman, instead of turning her out of doors for a cheat, did as she was bid. She put the guineas into a bason which she gave into Rachel's hand. Rachel strewed some white powder over the gold, muttered some barbarous words, and pretended to perform the black art. She then told Mrs. Jenkins to put the bason quietly down within the cellar; telling her that if she offered to look into it, or even to speak a word, the charm would be broken. She also directed her to lock the cellar door, and on no pretence to open it in less than forty-eight hours. "If," added she, "you closely follow these directions, then, by the power of my art, you will find the bason conveyed

to the very stone under which the money lies hid, and a fine treasure it will be." Mrs. Jenkins, who believed every word the woman said, did exactly as she was told, and Rachel took her leave with a handsome reward.

When farmer Jenkins came home, he desired his wife to draw him a cup of cider; this she put off doing so long that he began to be displeased. At last she begged he would drink a little beer instead. He insisted on knowing the reason, and when at last he grew angry, she told him all that had passed, and owned that as the pot of gold happened to be in the cider cellar, she did not dare to open the door, as she was sure it would break the charm.—"And it would be a pity, you know," said she "to lose a good fortune for the sake of a draught of cider." The farmer, who was not so easily imposed upon, suspected a trick. He demanded the key, and went and opened the cellar-door; there he found the bason, and in it five round pieces of tin covered with powder. Mrs. Jenkins burst out a-crying, but the farmer thought of nothing but of getting a warrant to apprehend the cunning woman. Indeed she well proved her claim to that name, when she insisted that the cellar-door might be kept locked till she had time to get out of reach of all pursuit.

Poor Sally Evans! I am sure she rued the day that ever she listened to a fortune-teller! Sally was as harmless a girl as ever churned a pound of butter; but Sally was ignorant and superstitious. She delighted in dream-books, and had consulted all the cunning-women in the country to tell her whether the two moles on her cheek denoted that she was to have two husbands, or only two children. If she picked up an old horse-shoe going to church

she was sure that would be a lucky week. She never made a black pudding without borrowing one of the parsons old wigs to hang in the chimney, firmly believing there were no other means to preserve them from bursting. She would never go to bed on Midsummer-eve without sticking up in her room the well-known plant called Midsummer-men, as the bending of the leaves to the right or to the left, would never fail to tell her whether Jacob, of whom we shall speak presently, was true or false. She would rather go five miles about than pass near a church-yard at night. Every seventh year she would not eat beans because they grew downward in the pod, instead of upward; and she would rather have gone with her gown open than have taken a pin of an old woman, for fear of being bewitched. Poor Sally had so many unlucky days in her calendar, that a large portion of her time became of little use, because on these days she did not dare set about any new work. And she would have refused the best offer in the country if made to her on a Friday, which she thought so unlucky a day that she often said what a pity it was that there was any Friday in the week. Sally had twenty pounds left her by her grandmother. She had long been courted by Jacob, a sober lad, with whom she lived fellow-servant at a creditable farmer's. Honest Jacob, like his namesake of old, thought it little to wait seven years to get this damsel to wife, because of the love he bore her, for Sally had promised to marry him when he could match her twenty pounds with another of his own.

Now there was one Robert, a rambling, idle young gardner, who, instead of sitting down steadily

in one place, used to roam about the country, and do odd jobs where he could get them. No one understood any thing about him, except that he was a down-looking fellow, who came nobody knew whence, and got his bread nobody knew how, and never had a penny in his pocket. Robert, who was now in the neighbourhood, happened to hear of Sally Evans and her twenty pounds. He immediately conceived a longing desire for the latter.—So he went to his old friend Rachel, told her all he had heard of Sally, and promised if she could bring about a marriage between them, she should go shares in the money.

Rachel undertook the business. She set off to the farm-house, and fell to singing one of her most enticing songs just under the dairy window. Sally was so struck with the pretty tune, which was unhappily used, as is too often the case, to set off some very loose words, that she jumped up, dropped the skimming-dish into the cream, and ran out to buy the song. While she stooped down to rummage the basket for those songs which had the most tragical pictures, (for Sally had a tender heart, and delighted in whatever was mournful) Rachel looked stedfastly in her face, and told her she knew by her art that she was born to good fortune, but advised her not to throw herself away. "These two moles on your cheek," added she, "shew you are in some danger."—"Do they denote husbands or children?" cried Sally, starting up and letting fall the song of the Children in the Wood.—"Husbands," muttered Rachel. "Alas! Poor Jacob!" said Sally, mournfully, "then he will die first, won't he?"—"Mum for that," quoth the fortune-teller, "I will say no more." Sally was impatient, but the more

curiosity she discovered, the more mistery Rachel affected. At last she said, " if you will cross my hand with a piece of silver, I will tell you your fortune. By the power of my art I can do this three ways; by cards, by the lines of your hand, or by turning a cup of tea-grounds; which will you have?" " O, all! all!" cried Sally, looking up with reverence to this sun-burnt oracle of wisdom, who knew no less than three different ways of diving into the secrets of futurity. Alas! persons of better sense than Sally have been so taken in—the more is the pity! The poor girl said, she would run up stairs to her little box where she kept her money tied up in a bit of an old glove, and would bring down a bright queen Ann's sixpence very crooked. " I am sure," added she, " it is a lucky one, for it cured me of a very bad ague last spring, by only laying it nine nights under my pillow without speaking a word. But then you must know what gave the virtue to this sixpence was, that it had belonged to three young men of the name of John; I am sure I had work enough to get it. But true it is, it certainly cured me. It must be the sixpence, you know, for I am sure I did nothing else for my ague, except indeed taking some bitter stuff every three hours which the doctor called bark. To be sure I lost my ague soon after I took it, but I am certain it was owing to the crooked sixpence and not to the bark. And so, good woman, you may come in if you will, for there is not a soul in the house but me." This was the very thing Rachel wanted to know, and very glad she was to learn it.

While Sally was above stairs untying her glove, Rachel slipped into the parlour, took a small silver cup from the beaufet, and clapped it into her pocket.

Sally run down lamenting that she had lost her sixpence, which she verily believed was owing to her having put it into a left glove instead of a right one. Rachel comforted her by saying, that if she gave her two plain ones instead, the charm would work just as well. Simple Sally thought herself happy to be let off so easily, never calculating that a smooth shilling was worth two crooked sixpences. But this skill was a part of the black art in which Rachel excelled. She took the money and began to examine the lines of Sally's left hand. She bit her withered lips, shook her head, and bade her poor dupe beware of a young man who had black hair. "No, indeed," cried Sally, all in a fright, "you mean black eyes, for our Jacob has got brown hair, 'tis his eyes that are black."—"That is the very thing I was going to say," muttered Rachel. "I meant his eyes, though I said hair, for I know his hair is as brown as a chesnut, and his eyes as black as a sloe."—"So they are, sure enough," cried Sally, "how in the world could you know that?"—forgetting that she herself had just told her so. And it is thus that these hags pick out of the credulous all which they afterwards pretend to reveal to them. "O, I know a pretty deal more than that," said Rachel, "but you must be aware of this man."—"Why so," cried Sally with great quickness: "Because," answered Rachel, "you are fated to marry a man worth a hundred of him, who has blue eyes, light hair, and a stoop in the shoulders."—"No, indeed, but I can't" said Sally, "I have promised Jacob, and Jacob I will marry."—"You cannot, child," returned Rachel, in a solemn tone; "it is out of your power, you are fated to marry the grey eyes and light hair."—"Nay indeed," said

Sally, sighing deeply, "if I am fated, I must; I know there is no resisting one's fate." This is a common cant with poor deluded girls, who are not aware that they themselves make their fate by their folly, and then complain there is no resisting it.—"What can I do?" said Sally. "I will tell you that too," said Rachel. "You must take a walk next Sunday afternoon to the church-yard, and the first man you meet in a blue coat, with a large posy of pinks and southernwood in his bosom, sitting on the church-yard wall, about seven o'clock, he will be the man."—"Provided," said Sally, much disturbed, "he has grey eyes and stoops."—"O, to be sure," said Rachel, "otherwise it is not the right man."—"But if I should mistake," said Sally, "if two men may happen to have a coat and eyes of the same colour?"—"To prevent that," replied Rachel, "If it is the right man, the two first letters of his name will be R. P. This man has got money beyond sea."—"O, I do not value his money," said Sally, with tears in her eyes, "for I love Jacob better than house or land; but if I am fated to marry another, I can't help it; you know there is no struggling against my fate."

Poor Sally thought of nothing and dreamt of nothing all the week but the blue coat and the grey eyes. She made an hundred blunders at her work. She put her rennet into the butter-pan, instead of the cheese-tub. She gave the curd to the hogs, and put the whey into the vats. She put her little knife out of her pocket for fear it should cut love, and would not stay in the kitchen if there was not an even number of people, lest it should break the charm. She grew cold and mysterious in her behaviour to faithful Jacob, whom she truly loved.

But the more she thought of the fortune-teller, the more she was convinced that brown hair and black eyes were not what she was fated to marry, and therefore, though she trembled to think it, Jacob could not be the man.

On Sunday she was too uneasy to go to church; for poor Sally had never been taught, that her being uneasy was only a fresh reason why she ought to go thither. She spent the whole afternoon in her little garret, dressing in all her best. First she put on her red ribbon, which she had bought at last Lammas fair: then she recollected that red was an unlucky colour, and changed it for a blue ribbon, tied in a true lover's knot; but suddenly called to mind that poor Jacob had bought this knot for her of a pedlar at the door, and that she had promised to wear it for his sake, her heart smote her, and she laid it by, sighing to think that she was not fated to marry the man who had given it to her. When she had looked at herself twenty times in the glass, for one vain action always brings on another, she set off, trembling and quaking every step she went. She walked eagerly towards the church-yard, not daring to look to the right or left, for fear she should spy Jacob, who would have offered to walk with her, and so have spoilt all. As soon as she came within sight of the wall, she spied a man sitting upon it. Her heart beat violently. She looked again; but alas! the stranger not only had on a black coat, but neither hair nor eyes answered the description. She now happened to cast her eyes on the church-clock, and found she was two hours before her time. This was some comfort. She walked away, and got rid of the two hours as well as she could, paying great attention as she went on

not to walk over any straws which lay across, and carefully looking to see if there were never an old horse shoe in the way, that infallible symptom of good fortune. While the clock was striking seven she returned to the church-yard, and, O! the wonderful power of fortune-tellers! there she saw him! there sat the very man! his hair as light as flax, his eyes as blue as butter milk, and his shoulders as round as a tub. Every tittle agreed, to the very nosegay in his waistcoat button hole. At first, indeed, she thought it had been sweetbriar, and, glad to catch at a straw, whispered to herself, it is not he, and I shall marry Jacob still; but on looking again, she saw it was southernwood plain enough, and that of course all was over. The man accosted her with some very nonsensical, but too acceptable compliments. Sally was naturally a modest girl, and but for Rachel's wicked arts, would not have had courage to talk with a strange man; but how could she resist her fate, you know? After a little discourse, she asked him, with a trembling heart, what might be his name? "Robert Price, at your service," was the answer. "Robert Price! that is R. P. as sure as I am alive, and the fortune-teller was a witch! it is all out! it is all out! O the wonderful art of the fortune-tellers."

The little sleep she had that night was disturbed with dreams of graves, and ghosts, and funerals; but as they were morning dreams, she knew those always went by contraries, and that a funeral denoted a wedding. Still a sigh would now and then heave, to think that in that wedding Jacob could have no part. Such of my readers as know the power which superstition has over the weak and credulous mind, scarcely need be told, that poor

Sally's unhappiness was soon completed. She forgot all her vows to Jacob; she at once forsook an honest man whom she loved, and consented to marry a stranger, of whom she knew nothing, from a ridiculous notion that she was compelled to do so by a decree which she had it not in her power to resist. She married this Robert Price, the strange gardner, whom she found to be very worthless, and very much in debt. He had no such things as "money beyond sea," as the fortune-teller had told her; but, alas! he had another wife there. He got immediate possession of Sally's twenty pounds. Rachel put in for her share, but he refused to give her a farthing, and bid her get away or he would have her taken up on the vagrant act. He soon ran away from Sally, leaving her to bewail her own weakness; for it was that indeed, and not any irresistible fate which had been the cause of her ruin. To complete her misery, she herself was suspected of having stolen the silver cup which Rachel had pocketed. Her master, however, would not prosecute her, as she was falling into a deep decline, and she died in a few months of a broken heart, a sad warning to all credulous girls!

Rachel, whenever she got near home, used to drop her trade of fortune telling, and only dealt in the wares of her basket. Mr. Wilson, the clergyman, found her one day dealing out some very wicked ballads to some children. He went up with a view to give her a reprimand; but had no sooner begun his exhortation, than up came a constable, followed by several people. "There she is, that is she, that is the old witch who tricked my wife out of the five guineas," said one of them. "Do

your office, constable, seize that old hag. She may tell fortunes and find pots of gold in Taunton gaol, for there she will have nothing else to do." This was the very farmer Jenkins whose wife had been cheated by Rachel of the five guineas. He did taken pains to trace her to her own parish; he had not so much value the loss of the money, but he thought it was a duty he owed to the public to clear the country of such vermin. Mr. Wilson immediately committed her. She took her trial at the next assizes, when she was sentenced to a year's imprisonment. In the mean time the pawnbroker to whom she had sold the silver cup, which she had stole from poor Sally's master, impeached her; and as the robbery was fully proved upon Rachel, she was sentenced for this crime to Botany Bay; and a happy day it was for the county of Somerset, when such a nuisance was sent out of it. She was transported much about the same time that her husband Giles lost his life, in stealing the net from the garden wall, as related in the Second Part of Poaching Giles.

I have thought it my duty to print this little history, as a kind of warning to all you young men and maidens not to have any thing to say to *cheats, impostors, cunning-women, fortune-tellers, conjurers,* and *interpreters* of *dreams.* Listen to me, your true friend, when I assure you that God never reveals to weak and wicked women those secret designs of his providence, which no human wisdom is able to foresee. To consult these false oracles is not only foolish, but sinful. It is foolish, because they are themselves as ignorant as those whom they pretend to teach! and it is sinful because it is prying into that futurity which God, in

mercy as well as wisdom, hides from men. God indeed *orders* all things; but when you have a mind to do a foolish thing, do not fancy you are *fated* to do it. This is tempting Providence, and not trusting him. It is indeed, "charging God with folly." Prudence is his gift, and you obey him better when you make use of prudence, under the direction of prayer, than when you madly run into ruin, and think you are only submitting to your fate. Never fancy that you are compelled to undo yourself, or to rush upon your own destruction, in compliance with any supposed fatality. Never believe that God conceals his will from a sober Christian who obeys his laws, and reveals it to a vagabond gipsey, who runs up and down breaking the laws, both of God and man. King Saul never consulted the which till he had left off serving God. The Bible will direct us what to do, better than any conjurer, and no days are unlucky but those which we make so by our own vanity, folly, and sin.

Z.

THE END.